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Local Communities Get Customized Transportation Boost from TIA Discretionary Funds

From motor graders and soil compactors to road resurfacing and sidewalk installation, local jurisdictions across the three Georgia regions that passed the Transportation Investment Act (TIA) are benefiting from the unique discretionary funds provision of the Act.

In each region, 25 percent of funds raised through TIA are returned to each county and city for discretionary local transportation projects. The amount of revenue returned is determined by a formula employing the “LARP factor” (from Georgia DOT’s Local Assistance Road Program), which is based on the percentage of road miles and population in each jurisdiction.

The discretionary funds allow local jurisdictions to tailor TIA revenue to their individual needs, as the funds can be used for a wide variety of transportation projects. Per TIA legislation, these include new or existing airports, bike lanes, bridges, bus and rail mass transit systems, freight and passenger rail, pedestrian facilities, ports, roads, terminals, and all activities and structures relating to transportation operations and maintenance.

In the River Valley Region, Sumter County has used the funds to purchase much-needed heavy machinery for road maintenance according to Frank Whitaker, the county’s Director of Public Works.

“We’ve purchased two motor graders, a wheeled excavator, a tandem dump truck, a rubber-tired backhoe, an 84-inch soil compactor, two pickup trucks, a wood chipper, a farm tractor, mower and a tow type rubber-tire roller,” Whitaker said.

All that equipment will be put to use resurfacing over 11 miles of roadway and restriping 120 miles of roads. Whitaker said discretionary funds will also be used to replace signs and drainage pipes, and to pave an entrance road to a new “T” Hanger project at the Jimmy Carter Regional Airport.

Sumter County Administrator Bill Twomey said that the county has struggled to meet transportation needs over recent years, but the TIA funds have helped the county push through the funding challenges.

“With the advent of TIA, many of our transportation needs - not all - have been addressed. We’ve been able to cobble together multiple sources for resurfacing, striping and repairs. The effects of these funds have definitely

expedited these projects and have added to the feasibility of others,” Twomey said.

Harris County, also in River Valley, chose to use a portion of their discretionary funds on road maintenance and has, thus far, resurfaced approximately 20 miles of roadway. However, County Manager Greg Wood explained that the TIA funds have played a much larger role in the area’s transportation planning.

“Our TIA funds have been used to augment LMIG {Local Maintenance & Improvement Grant} funding for bridge repair and replacement. We use them in conjunction with our LMIG funds in order to package our bids and maximize on the economies of scale,” Wood said. “Had it not been for TIA funds only about 25 percent of these projects would have been completed.”

Leveraging TIA funds with other transportation initiatives has become a common practice across the TIA regions, especially in the Central Savannah River Area. Burke County Administrator Merv Waldrop said the county is using their 25 percent discretionary funding to resurface county roads and as a local match for the Rural Transit program. The combination has helped necessary repairs occur much more rapidly than originally planned, and has preserved funding for non-transit related needs.

“We will resurface every road in the county within the 10 years of the TIA program. This is already having a noticeable impact,” Waldrop said. “The resurfacing would not occur at this pace if we didn’t have TIA, and the funding for transit would have been taken from the General Fund, reducing other programs such as recreation.”

South of Burke County in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha (HOGA) region, L. Guy Singletary, Johnson County Administrator, agrees that TIA funding has increased the county’s ability to provide greater transportation maintenance and operation (M&O) services.

“This funding has been very important to our community. We would not be providing the same level of M&O services without it. Several of the purchases would have had to take place, but the TIA funds certainly expedited the process,” Singletary said.

Likewise, in other parts of HOGA, TIA has afforded local jurisdictions the means to respond to transportation needs with a greater sense of urgency. Laurens County Administrator Bryan Rogers said the county is using the discretionary funding primarily on drainage improvements, such as culvert and cross drain replacement, and bridge improvements.

“Having the TIA funds has greatly increased the frequency of these projects. The projects that we have been working on would have developed over time however, but it would have been more of a reactive process and only addressing them once the structures had completely failed,” Rogers said.

Forty-six counties and their respective cities comprise the three regional districts that approved the 2012 TIA Referendum. Cumulatively, they are expected to self-generate \$1.6 Billion in new revenue over 10 years dedicated to local transportation improvements. Projects were selected by regional commission roundtables of local elected officials after public input. Seventy-five percent of the revenue is utilized for the construction of these projects while the remaining 25 percent is disbursed monthly to the regions' governments for discretionary use on local transportation-related efforts. The TIA Program is administered by the Georgia Department of Transportation. For more information visit www.ga-tia.com, or follow TIA on Facebook (www.facebook.com/transportationinvestmentact) and Twitter (<https://twitter.com/TIAatGDOT>).